

Moving pictures

A video competition attracted a fascinating set of entries on the lives and work of women in the fisheries across the world

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Women are active participants in the fishing sector. Nearly half of those who earn incomes from the fisheries are women, and the proportion is much higher in the case of aquaculture. In the fisheries, women and men work together, women being heavily employed in the post-harvest sector. In certain regions, women work not just in post-harvest but in all aspects of the sector. For some, it is their mainstay; for others, it is a supporting activity.

All these aspects of women's work in the fisheries were brought to life on film in the entries submitted for a video competition on 'Women in Seafood', that was announced recently, in preparation for the World Seafood Congress to be held in Iceland in 2017. The organizers hoped that this would provide a platform for sharing stories about the status, of women in the seafood industry, the problems they face and potential solutions. The competition attracted 14 entries from all over the world.

The videos were from different parts of the world, representing the diversity of women's roles in fisheries. A common feature of these videos was that they often relied on interviews with women in the sector, filmed at work, who answered questions even as their hands were busy sorting, cleaning, peeling and filleting. Clearly, time was of the essence and not to be wasted, for after this work was done, there remained the housework to be completed. Most of the women featured in the videos, especially from the less developed countries were mired in poverty, and so, earning to maintain their families was of great importance. But for those from the developed world, the focus was more on environmental sustainability and responsible fishing.

The winner of the competition was the film titled *The Women of Petatán*, made by Carmen Pedroza-Gutiérrez. This five-minute video, which focuses on fish filleters from a fishing village bordering Lake Chapala in Mexico, features a set of candid interviews.

As women steadily fillet piles of carp and other fish, they explain why they have taken on this work. The wages are piece rate, which means no fixed hours, and the women get paid for what they do. The flexibility is important as they have to take care of their homes and children. Some begin to work at an early age, sometimes soon after leaving primary school as extra family income becomes necessary. Others join the sector because they prefer this work to cleaning houses or working in the fields. The money they earn they may spend on themselves or on their families as circumstances demand. Injuries are the greatest fear as cutting themselves on a sharp knife may warrant stitches and then 'who will provide the food when they take a break'?

Three other videos also focussed on the post-harvest processing sector.

ICAR-CIFE: Women in Seafoods by Gomathy.V is about processing units in the Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu, one of India's coastal states. Besides working in these units, women also participate in the harvest of crabs which are then processed for export. The processing sector is dominated by young women, mostly from the fishing community. While the film provides a lot of statistical information, there are technical glitches related to voice-over and subtitling which interfere with the viewing experience.

Women in Salted Fish Industry at Tambak Lorok by Zahrah Izzaturrahim looks at the lives of the women in the salted fish industry in Tambak Lorok, the biggest fishing village in Samarang, Central Java, Indonesia. The video includes brief interviews with women who buy, process and sell salted fish. The money earned often forms a significant proportion of the family income and, as always, the work is in addition to the household work of women. This recognition of women's work and their needs is important but greater attention could have been paid to the difficulties faced at home and the workplace.

Gutting for Living: Unromantic tale of fishermen's wives, the title of the documentary made by Prasad Kaushalya Dodangodage, featuring fisherwomen from Negumbo, Sri Lanka, is a bit misleading. While the film does begin with a focus on fish processors whose work is to gut fish meant for drying, there is a sudden and inexplicable shift to the relatively

wealthier class of women fish sellers in Negumbo fish market.

The film begins with the processing of dry fish by women who are seen cleaning and cutting fish brought ashore in huge baskets. Sharp knives in hand, the work proceeds at a fast pace since the money earned is proportional to the quantity of fish processed. The temporary shelters these women work in offer only a modicum of meagre shade. But for those who have to dry the fish on coir mats or plastic sheets out in the open, there is no option but to work in the harsh sun. These are women whose lives are poverty stricken. Lakshmi, a fish processor, describes the work, as her hands keep busy cutting fish. For most women, she says, their work supports the work the men do; for example, they may repair fishing nets. They take up these tasks only after their household chores are finished. They may work together as a team or as couples. Lakshmi is clear that she does not want her children to follow this occupation. Thereafter, the story suddenly moves on to the Negumbo fish market, which is dominated by women fish vendors who are relatively well-off. From there, it journeys on to explore the role of women in Sri Lanka's fisheries sector and the export potential of the sector. From Negumbo's fish market where women rule, we move to the second largest fish market in Mexico Zaponan, Jalisco, Mexico, where also women dominate. But here is an altogether different atmosphere.

Business Women in a Wholesale Fish Market by Carmen Pedroza-Gutiérrez shows that women work in every position including positions of leadership. The president of the market is a woman. More and more women are going out fishing and doing what used to be men's work, including filleting. There is increased understanding about women's rights and the need to get organized.

In Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, the focus today is on environmental sustainability. *Afishionado* by Hana Nelson talks about a group of fishmongers who work to provide seafood to customers in the most transparent way possible. They connect harvesters—low impact fishers and small-scale aquaculturists—and customers, and through education and awareness, also promote sustainable seafood. This approach seems credible and the viewer is left feeling that it should garner greater support and become a worldwide movement.

Women's roles in the seafood sector have been mostly in the post-harvest sector. But why should it be so? Is it possible for women, if they so desire, to be integrated into a traditionally male sector—working as crew to carry out the activities of a long distance vessel?

Women on Board by Maria Caldiero is the result of a research and participative observation under an initiative named Project Redmar where the focus was not merely on harvesting but also on gender, safety and environment related issues. Currently, no crew in Spanish fishing vessels are women though they may be present as scientific observers. The film focuses on a woman named Ascensión, who emerges as a role model for other women entering the sector.

"It is time to start the conversation to enable change, considering the role women play in the industry," is the message from the film titled *Seafood Women Making a Difference* by Jen Shaw, which is about the women in the seafood industry in Australia. The film shows how, despite the fact that women make up more than 55 per cent of the seafood community in all facets, from harvesting to research, compliance, transport, and marketing, barely five per cent are decision- and change-makers in the boardroom or in senior management. Women's representation at top levels is well below the average, as compared to other primary sectors. To achieve balanced outcomes, there needs to be greater gender diversity, and women in the seafood industry should gain greater all-round visibility.

Similar thoughts are echoed in *Something Happens with Fishing: An original idea* by ARVI, a film made by Cooperativa de Armadores de Pescadel Puerto de Vigo from Vigo, Spain. Through a series of questions and answers, the film establishes the importance of fishing in terms of generating employment and food security, as well as of the team work involved.

Aportes de las Mujeres en las Pesquerías de Pequeñaescala or *Women's Contributions to Small-scale Fisheries* is by CoopeSoliDar. Through the voices of many women working in the small-scale sector in fisheries in Costa Rica, it shows the variety of women's work in the sector and the pride women take in it, no matter how hard the labour. These women believe they deserve recognition. They believe that a national fisherwomen agenda is needed so that their voices may reach relevant political bodies.

To ensure that one's voice is heard at the highest level means a lot of hard work. *Journey for a Voice* by Leonie Noble is a film from the Abrolhos Islands off the western coast of Australia. It shows the kind of effort that is needed for the voices of women workers in the predominantly rural, seafood industry to reach the Senate: a 4000 km journey that starts at dawn with a walk to the jetty to drive the dinghy to an airstrip two islands away, followed by the first of the four flights needed to reach the capital, Canberra, 12 hours and three time zones away. The journey certainly helps to put things in perspective!

Challenges of Women in Seafood by Ngozi Margaret Oguguah does not easily fall into any category. It simply gives a quick view of the state of fishers in Sagbokoji village, Lagos State, Nigeria. A riverine village settlement near Lagos port, it has only a primary school and though the women who sell fish do not want their daughters to do the same, there appear to be few alternatives even for those who have schooling. Some of the women fish sellers were born into families where fishing was the mainstay; others entered the sector independently and learnt by watching others. With no access to basic facilities like hospitals, water supply and power, the community's poverty emerges sharply against the backdrop of huge cranes and other infrastructure of Lagos port.

Some of the films highlight the important issues of self-sufficiency and food security. *Making Waves: Rethinking Seaweed Farming for Women's Empowerment*, a film by Cecile Brugere, highlights the three-decade-old seaweed farming activities supported by Sea PoWer, an organization that works with

communities of women across East Africa. Aerial shots show rectangular patches of seagrass farms in water, with the higher value seaweed farms in deeper waters, an innovation to overcome the problems associated with traditional peg and rope seaweed farming as global temperatures rise. This initiative by SeaPoWer is supported by the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. While the film addresses important issues, the new tubular net, apparently an easier technology to operate, could have been better explained in the video.

In Barisal District, Bangladesh, not the sea but household ponds are the focus for improved food security. *Gill Nets Boost Women's Involvement in Aquaculture in Bangladesh* by Kate Bevitt, shows how a simple net that can be operated from the pond bank can release women from dependence on men to harvest fish. Women do not enter the pond to harvest fish and men are not always available to do this. Gill nets that can be handled from the bank have helped women to harvest small varieties of fish, and women have also been taught to cook the fish so as to optimise nutrition, thus enhancing food security.

A picture is worth a thousand words, and when it is a moving picture, the impact is greater still. Images that bring alive the harsh realities of life and also the power of change are absolutely essential to get the story across. These films are a testimony to the dynamism, determination and dedication of the women in the seafood sector.

For more information, and to watch these films, visit <https://www.womeninseafood.com/videos?cn=bWVudGlvbg%3D%3D> 📺

